

Marvin Kalb, CBS Radio, First Line Report, State Department,  
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PM Rabin of Israel arrives in the United States today, the start of a critical round of talks with President Ford.

Last March when Secretary Kissinger's shuttle negotiation collapsed, the common American assumption was that PM Rabin of Israel was too weak to make a deal. A general who had become an ambassador and then through a series of political flukes, the leader of his country, Rabin was seen here as politically inexperienced, somewhat inept, running the Cabinet that was split and ultimately paralyzed, unable to make timely and critical decisions. For this combination of reasons, among others, the negotiation collapsed according to American officials who add Rabin disappointed both the President and the Secretary. The Israelis of course have a somewhat different analysis of the March breakdown; they say Kissinger miscalculated Israel's position in a way misleading the Egyptians into believing that he could deliver Rabin but in fact he could not. The Israelis also say that Kissinger reacted emotionally to his failure personalizing his disappointment into a doomsday projection of another Middle East war in which Israel's position would be badly jeopardized.

There is obviously a lingering taste of bitterness among many Israelis towards Kissinger but they would still receive him as an American mediator but clearly not with open arms. Not after he is reported to have blamed them for the breakdown of his March shuttle. They speak in terms of a lower ranking official coming out to the Middle East picking up the shuttle not because they really believe that but because they want to open a bit of distance between themselves and the Secretary who disappointed them. So when the Israeli Prime Minister arrives here later today he will be seeking to open a direct pipeline to President Ford. He will of course meet with Kissinger, quite often in fact, but a fresh rapport with the President is one of his principal aims, based on the Israeli's hope for a common approach to peace. Rabin comes with a clear-cut mandate from his Cabinet to be flexible if he finds flexibility in the Egyptian position. Rabin wants another interim arrangement in the Sinai if possible and the atmosphere is right for a deal. Officials on both sides are voicing what is called guarded optimism. But what Rabin wants even more than that is a sense of long term American policy, specifically a presidential commitment to an uninterrupted flow of American arms and economic aid.

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Since March the Ford Administration has been engaged in a reassessment of policy, a convenient device really for delaying the public decision. Part of that reassessment has been a refusal to make new arms commitments to Israel. In different ways the Israelis are now hinting strongly that if that embargo is not lifted there will be very little chance of diplomatic progress. If it is lifted a good chance of a deal. Rabin will do what Israeli PM's have always done on visits to Washington, he will confer at length with the President and the Secretary, a briefer session with Defense Secretary Schlesinger, dinners with Israeli bond groups, meetings with key committees of Congress, a news conference, a Sunday TV program in fact. Rabin is battling for American public opinion, no less so than Sadat of Egypt, and Rabin's talks here this week will go a long way towards determining whether a good atmosphere can really be translated into a good deal.